

RAFA LUTION



Benitez

TODAY we reveal the secrets of Liverpool boss Rafa Benitez's Red Revolution.

Benitez has completely transformed the club who were the sleeping giants of English football when he arrived in 2004.

And SunSport can uncover the most intimate secrets of what is known around Anfield as the Rafalution.

Resurgent Liverpool moved within a point of Premier League leaders Manchester United at the weekend and suddenly their first title in 19 years does not seem impossible.

Benitez, 48, has just signed a new five-year, £20million contract in a superb fortnight that has seen the Reds put 13 goals past Real Madrid, United and Aston Villa.

So as the Spaniard begins his second five-year cycle at the club we reveal how he:

Has created a 70-strong scouting network and a players' database with information on 14,000 professionals.

Transformed the training ground and even had a hotel built for the players at Melwood.

Banned fizzy drinks and revolutionised the players' eating habits.

Built a video room and hired staff who can get any game from the world's 12 top leagues.

Benitez's former Anfield No 2 Paco Herrera, now boss of Castellon in Spain, was a vital member of his original quartet of assistants that also included Paco Ayestaran, Jose Manuel Ochotorena and Alex Miller.

Herrera said: "Rafa lives football 24 hours a day, that's the first detail.

"He has faith in his coaching staff and we had a

great team of people.

"In the first two years we played five finals and we won three.

"It was an excellent group of people. We met every morning to prepare the work of the week and the work of the day.

"We studied the rivals we were going to face. Benitez does not leave any room for improvisation and he himself supervises everything.

"It's true he has a database with information on more than 10,000 players.

"Everything started when we arrived there. I signed on as assistant manager but three months later my role changed because we all realised that there were serious problems in the technical department.

"Liverpool was very antiquated in that sense. So Rafa asked me to change my role and occupy myself with this issue. He wanted me to become the chief scout and start organising, along with himself, the technical department.

"It was when we started to sign up all the scouts — and from what I remember all the ones who started then are still there.

"All of them, or almost all of them, have had a direct professional relationship with Rafa — like Laurent Viaud, who was a player at Extremadura when Rafa was boss and is now a French scout.

"We started incorporating people from one country or another. As time went by Rafa proposed to create a personal database, apart from the one at the club which is also very interesting.

"So he created a personal one and that's where every day all the scouts from every country are putting information on all the players they are watching.

"I would say it would be closer to 14,000 players than 10,000."

And thorough Benitez did not stop at the scouting network. Everything from dietary habits to training-ground facilities and spying on Liverpool's opponents changed radically.

A video room was created with a dedicated team of people who can give Benitez DVDs of any game he wants from at least 12 top leagues in the world.

And a hotel was built in the training ground so the manager can keep his players there on the eve of big games, especially in Europe.

Herrera added: "Everything was created little by little.

"Most of the things were done in the first two years. Like the video room, with staff who deal with this issue 100 per cent.

"There are big satellite dishes and contracts with two or three companies that make sure that every month the club get all the videos from every country.

"There have been little improvements, even though Melwood was already an excellent training ground.

"In the second year we started building

a hotel of about 20 rooms.

"It was completed before I left, so that the players could concentrate there above all before Champions League games.

"The players rest there in the training centre and they don't go to any hotel.

"Ayestaran and Benitez also created small hills in the training ground for the players to do resistance running.

"Everything is very detailed and thought through."

The players' dietary habits also underwent a radical transformation, from the times of meals to what the Kop idols actually eat.

Herrera added: "Yes, the dietary habits were changed from the outset when we arrived.

"In general terms, in the teams where the management staff were English the diet was not very careful.

"So at the start in the entire training ground, which is very big, in the restaurant, in areas with refrigerators where you can get energy drinks and isotonic drinks — as soon as Rafa arrived he banned everything that he thought might be bad for the players.

"From that day the food was meticulously studied because the players eat breakfast there and also lunch.

"Now every breakfast or lunch is made with commonsense for the good of an athlete."

Having inherited a distinctly average squad from previous chief Gerard Houllier, Benitez managed to go on and win the Champions League, European Super Cup and the FA Cup in his first two years.

He reached the Champions League final again in 2007 but lost to AC Milan — the side the Reds famously came back from three down at half-time to beat in Istanbul two years before that.

This season Liverpool are mounting a credible title challenge for the first time during the Benitez era — and the first time since the 2001-02 campaign when the Anfield outfit finished second behind Arsenal.

Since Herrera left in the summer of 2006, Benitez's backroom set-up has also undergone a transformation.

Former players Sammy Lee and Mauricio Pellegrino, plus ex-Valencia and Atletico Madrid fitness coach Paco De Miguel, now hold the key positions.

Herrera added: "What most people like at Anfield is to have an idea of play and a set pattern. Win or lose, the team plays with purpose and a pre-determined idea.

"What they value is the personality of Rafa. Professionals are respected there and Rafa is hugely respected.

"Bill Shankly is a myth for them — he is everything.

"But I think that Rafa, in those five years at least, will match what they consider Shankly to be."